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Evaluation of the National Resource Library Network in Finland

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1. Introduction

For the development of national provision of scientific information, two models have been applied. The first one is based on assigning national responsibility for library and information services in each specified field of learning to the research library with the best holdings and staff resources in the field. These libraries, usually university libraries, have become national resource libraries, or national central libraries having two-fold duties. Germany and the Nordic countries have selected this model. The second model, known for example from the United Kingdom, involves the establishment of national libraries in additon to academic and other research libraries. A mixture of these models is found, for example, in France.

In Finland the national resource library system was selected on the proposal of a national inquiry carried out in the sixties, and the following ten resource libraries have since been appointed by the Government:

- Library of Parliament for law and political science
- Helsinki School of Economics Library for economics
- Helsinki University Library for the humanities
- Helsinki University, Agricultural Library for agriculture, food and nutrition science and home economics
- Helsinki University, Forestry Library for forestry
- Helsinki University, National Resource Library of Health Sciences for health sciences
- Jyväskylä University Library for education, psychology and physical education
- Tampere University Library for social sciences, journalism and communication, and library and information science
- Helsinki University of Technology Library for technology and related siences
- Library of the Central Statistical Office of Finland for statistics.

The national tasks of resource libraries are listed in a Government decision of 1972 as follows:

- develop collections in their fields
- make the holdings accessible for all who need the information
- perform interlending and information services in cooperation with other libraries and information centers in Finland and abroad
- cooperate with users of information
- foster cooperation with other libraries working in the same or related fields.

In 1991 the Finnish Council for Scientific Information decided that it was time to carry out an evaluation of the resource library network. At the time of the 14th Biennial IATUL Conference I had just been entrusted with this task.

Information retrieval on the subject of evaluating library networks, other than nets with one specific function, brought rather meagre results as far as papers on, for example, comparisons between research libraries. The evaluation method selected was based on

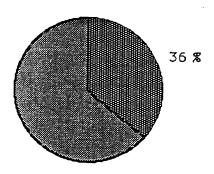
- national library statistics for 1975-1990
- annual reports of the ten libraries studied, for the same years
- interviews with the management and with the document supply staff of resource libraries
- interviews with users of the network
- a concluding round-table with the resource library directors for criticism and amendments of the draft report.

The evaluation covered the input/output ratio, the Boston Matrix, and future challenges, not least those presented by the newly-adopted operational cost-budgeting and by LINNEA, the Library Information Network for Academic Libraries in Finland and its joint system LINDA, both based on the American Virginia Institute of Technology Library system, VTLS.

2. Investments in the resource library network

The changes in the annual investments in acquisitions by the ten research libraries from 1980 to 1990, when compared with the respective increase in prices for foreign information sources, were positive, varying from 25 % to 295 %. Since 1990 the purchasing power of the Finnish Mark has, however, decreased considerably, whilst the prices for periodicals in chemistry and physics rose 34 % in two years and the prices for periodicals in technology 46 %. Accordingly the picture has become less encouraging. If sums invested in the acquisition of literature, CD-ROMs and other information media are compared in Finnish marks, the following table is obtained.

Acquisitions	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	Growth %
All 69 research libraries	26.5 million FIM	90.7 million FIM	242 %
Of this, the ten resource libraries	9.0 million FIM	28.3 million FIM	215 %
	(34 %)	(31 %)	



Resource library person-years in those of all research libraries in 1990.

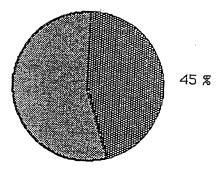
n = 1498 person years

36 % of the person-years of research libraries were performed in resource libraries. In 1980 this share was larger, 41 %.

2.1 Conclusion regarding input

Investment in resource libraries during 1980-1990 grew less rapidly than in research libraries in general. Money used for collection development has increased more slowly than in other research libraries, and staff resources in resource libraries have grown less rapidly than those in other research libraries. It should be noted, that the best research libraries became national resource libraries.

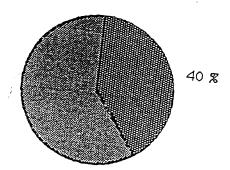
- 3. The output of resource libraries
- 3.1 Interlending and document supply



Inter-library loans and copy deliveries by resource libraries in those by all research libraries in 1990. $n = 250\,000$ deliveries

CD-ROM databases to facilitate library interlending, as well as OPACs, were all produced by resource libraries in 1990.

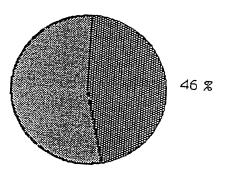
3.2 Library visits by external clients



Visits by 606 400 external clients to research libraries and the percentage of those to resource libraries in 1985.

3.3 User training

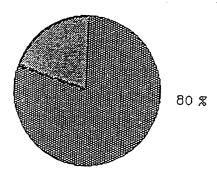
Users of CD-ROM databases and online databases of the libraries require more training and guiding than users of old card files and printed indexes.



User training hours by resource libraries as a percentage of those by all research libraries in 1990. n = 5 500 hours.

3.4 Production of databases

Special subject bibliographies and databases corresponding to them are, in the majority of cases, produced by resource libraries. The databases are online searchable mainly in the national KDOK reference data bank, maintained by the automation unit of the Finnish Research Libraries at the National Computer Center and, as regards some of them, in the computing centers of the institution in question. OPACs maintained by all resource libraries are not included in this connection.



Database production by resource libraries as a share in that of all research libraries in 1990. n = 50.

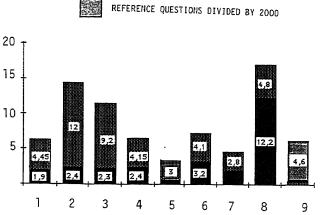
4. Numerical comparison of resource library efforts

In spite of the fact that the ten resource libraries are neither similar nor commensurable, an attempt was made to create an index for resource library work. For each library two kinds of services have been included. The number of deliveries in domestic document supply was divided by 3000, as one person-year is typically required for 3000 interlending deliveries, including copying, mailing, etc. In regard to the resource library for statistics this figure was substituted with the number of reference questions divided by 2000, as one person-year typically is needed for processing 2000 questions. The second figure is the number of person-years devoted to the production of databases within the resource library field.

It would be desirable to include in the index the performances of reference services and other information services of all resource libraries. The joint statistics of research libraries does not differentiate between those to internal and to external clients. A special survey is clearly needed. Guidance for external clients and user training should also be considered when developing the index for resource library work.

Indexes for resource library work in 1990

INTERLENDINING DELIVERIES DIVIDED BY 3000



- 1. Library of Parliament
- 2. Helsinki School of Economics Library
- PRODUCTION OF DATABASES: PERSON YEARS SPENT 3. Helsinki University Library
 - 4. Helsinki Univ., Agricultural Lib.
 - 5. Helsinki Univ., Forestry Library
 - 6. Jyväskylä University Library
 - 7. Tampere University Library
 - 8. Helsinki Univerity of Technology Lib.
 - 9. Statistics Library

The diagram clearly shows, however, the priority fields of the different resource libraries. In seven libraries, on the left side of the diagram, the first priority is given to the creation of databases and bibliographies, while interlending is the most demanded service form Helsinki University of Technology Library and data retrieval from the Library of the Central Statistical Office.

4.1 Conclusion regarding the output of resource libraries

As detailed above, the ten national resource libraries carry the responsibility for the major part of cooperation between libraries and of services to external users of information. When the modest resources reported on at the beginning of this paper are taken into consideration, great value must be attached to the output from resource libraries. The input/output ratio is so advantageous, that the decision to base scientific information provision on resource libraries must be considered to have been a wise one. Corresponding achievements and knowledge centers of excellence could not have been created with a smaller investment.

5. General conclusion

It can be seen that the services of resource libraries, to a great extent, have been based on the "noblesse oblige" principle. The best library in the field has been appointed resource library, which then has offered its collections and its expertise, as well as services, to all in need of information.

This evaluation of the network covered a period of constant economic growth followed by a recession which has, during the two latest years, resulted in both staff and budgetary cuts. The demand for chargeable library and information services and the income has been shrinking. The same applies to the purchasing power, as regards foreign information sources and services, of the Finnish mark.

The evaluation of the resource library network clearly shows that it will have to be given higher priority within information provision and special allocations, by the parent organizations of the libraries, as well as by the Government of Finland are required. The Finnish Council for Information Provision within the Ministry of Education is in a key position to undertake the follow-up of this evaluation.

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